

# NEWBURY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



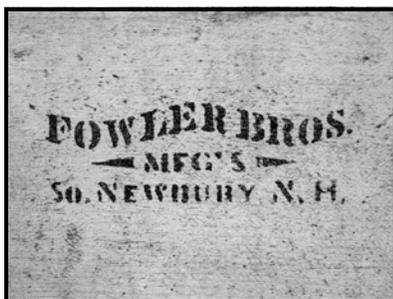
# Newsletter Volume 7, No. 3 Fall, 2010

## TOWN HALL SETTEES

After the meeting room was added to the town office building there appeared some rather old wooden benches. Perhaps you have wondered where they came from. Perhaps you have noticed the label on the back (Fig. 1) and wondered who were the Fowler brothers. This is the story of those benches, which at the time of their manufacture were called settees. To set the stage, let us look at two time lines that came together to create the settees.

From the razing of the Bly Hill meeting house in 1831 until 1871, town meetings were held in people's homes and taverns. There seemed to be little interest in building a town hall or town house as they called it. From 1871 to 1875 there was an article in the warrant each year to build a town house and every year it was turned down. In 1876, one proponent made a motion to build a town house and to have the vote by paper ballot. The vote to build was 76 to 59. The building was built in 1876 and there were motions approved in 1876 and 1877 to provide furnishings for the new town house.

John Cheever Fowler came to Newbury about 1847 and set up a carriage making business down by Andrew Brook in what is now known as South Newbury Village. He married Martha Jane Morse, a member of the large and influential Morse family. In that same year he bought and later raised his family in the house on the corner of Sleepy Street and Village Road that now belongs to Howard Eaton. John Fowler had five children, four boys and a girl. The girl, Martha Amariah, married Benjamin Gillingham and has descendants still living in town. The boys grew up working in the shop and learning the trade. By 1877, the year of interest to us, the boys were John Willis age 28, Charles 22, Arthur 20, and Elmer 14. It appears that by this time the business consisted of making rims for buggy wheels. The rims were made out of oak which was steamed and bent into a circle. John Cheever Fowler was listed as a machinist in the 1870 census and it is clear that John Willis and the brothers were expert machinists and woodworkers too.



← Fig. 1



Fig. 2 →

## Alice Lynn Honored at Annual Meeting



Board Members Deane Geddes, Dennis Pavlicek and Past President Tracy Messer present Alice with our plaque.

Photo by Bruce Marquis

Alice Lynn received the Society's first Director Emeritus designation and a plaque in appreciation for her many years of dedication to the Newbury Historical Society.

As a founding member of the organization Alice signed the original Articles of Agreement in 1986, became a Life Member in 1989, and received an Honorary Membership in 2004 for her long service as a Board member and Treasurer, and for holding the Society together during the lean years in the mid-1990's.

Prior to the founding of the Society she was one of several individuals in the community who shared an interest in the history of the town and who met frequently on an informal basis.

We all joined in honoring and thanking Alice for the many important roles she has played in serving our community.

The Historical Society is privileged to have received a transcript of John Willis Fowler's diary of 1877. In it he speaks often of the settees, from his original idea to the production of 40 for the town. Seats certainly were among the furnishings needed for the new town house, but it is not evident how Fowler Bros. became involved. It may be that John Willis wanted to contribute in some way and approached the Selectmen with the idea that he could make some settees.

The first few entries are:

**January 16, 1877**

*I have worked in the shop sharpening tools, and have made a very nice pattern for bottom of a settee which I intend to make .*

**January 31, 1877**

*Charles and I worked in the shop on the settee and did some odd jobs.*

**February 3, 1877**

*I worked in the shop and finished my settee and oiled it.*

**February 10, 1877**

*This evening we brought my new settee into the kitchen and cut the legs off a little and then sung a few pieces sitting in that.*

**February 13, 1877**

*I have repaired the planing machine and altered the form for settee bent leg and arm and some other work.*

**March 13, 1877**

*I have attended our Town Meeting in our Town Hall. The Town voted to buy settees for the hall and to have a free Hall. My sample settee was there and pleased all that wanted seats.*

**March 31, 1877**

*This morning I got our settee out of the Town Hall so that I can have it to measure in building others and saw Uncle Benj. he being the first selectman about building a lot for the town.*

**April 2, 1877**

*I got an order this after noon for 40 settees for the Town Hall to be completed by the first of September for \$150.00.*

The design of the settee is beautiful (Fig. 2). Each back leg and the support for the back is made of a single piece of oak bent into a gentle curve. On the ends, the front leg and the arm are formed from one piece of oak, bending in one direction for the leg, then in the opposite direction for the arm, and finally reversing again for the connection to the back. Even the short leg in the middle is bent to match. All of the other pieces are straight and are made of the finest rock maple that John could find in the area. John's attention to the bottom has paid off in a seat that is quite com-

fortable. Although many parts are assembled with screws, the critical joints are riveted.

During the next four months there are many entries chronicling the manufacturing of the settees. Below are some examples to give one a sense of the process.

**April 3, 1877**

*I have worked in the shop on settee work and in putting the machinery in order for sawing the maple plank. Charles has worked with me all day and Arthur part of the time and he has been to Bradford and got 2 loads of plank. Elmer has run the planing machine with some help and showing.*

**April 5, 1877**

*I went to the shop and two or three of us brothers have worked on settee stuff since then till night, and we got along nicely.*

**April 6, 1877**

*Charles, Arthur, and I have worked in the shop all day getting out slats for settee bottoms. We are getting along nicely, but find it is taking a pile of lumber.*

**April 25, 1877**

*We have bent a few settee arms and finally all four of us have been "active and usefull".*

**May 12, 1877**

*We are getting along well but find there is a pile of work in 45 settees made in the way we are making these.*

**May 15, 1877**

*We have been bending stuff for the settees.*

**May 19, 1877**

*We have got along on our work quite well, and hope to get our tennoning machine done and make 25 settees before the first of July.*

**May 22, 1877**

*I have worked in the shop on settee stuff and on our tennoning machine which we are making.*

**May 24, 1877**

*We have put the tennoning machine frame together and have got it in good shape and very solid. We are building a good machine.*

**June 12, 1877**

*We have worked on tennoning machine until we have got it into pretty good order and have made the tennons (225) for 45 settees, making one time 15 in 4 minutes in seasoned rock maple in the best maple possible.*

**June 15, 1877**

*All three of us brothers have worked putting settee bottoms together and we have got 25 done except cutting them off.*

**June 19, 1877**

*I have made some tools in the blacksmith shop which we are going to use in putting the settees together and*

*we have done a lot of work boring holes with a bit in the lathe and we have cut 150 gains on foot rails with our tennoning machine which by the way is a splendid machine and very useful.*

**June 27, 1877**

*We have put 4 settees together working fast 13 hours.*

*We have got 18 in the hall now and they look nicely.*

**July 7, 1877**

*This fore-noon I worked in the Town Hall helping oil the settees.*

**July 16, 1877**

*Charles and Arthur have varnished 25 settees.*

**August 15, 1877**

*At Manchester I bought the Planer for our shop which will plane settee stuff for us in good shape.*

**August 27, 1877**

*Chas. Arthur and Elmer have worked on settees and have finished the lot for this town which was 40 settees each 7 ft. long.*

**August 28, 1877**

*Chas. and Arthur have oiled the settees and have done a lot of other work.*

**August 29, 1877**

*Arthur has varnished 15 settees which completes the 40 which we have made for this Town.*

And that is the story of how the Newbury Town Hall got its settees. John tried to sell settees of this design in neighboring communities and as far away as Boston, but there is no evidence that he sold any in 1877.

We owe a great debt of gratitude to Linda Sargent of Rochester, NH for providing the diary transcript and sharing her knowledge of the Fowler family.

Bill Weiler



Pictured above is the Fowler family in front of their home on Sleepy Street in South Newbury (now the Eaton's home).

Front row: Arthur Fowler and Elmer Fowler.

Middle row: Charles Fowler, John Willis, Martha Fowler and Benjamin Gillingham who would become her husband.

Back Row: John Cheever Fowler and his wife Martha Jane Morse.

Approximate date of the picture is Thanksgiving, 1872.

### **PALS Collaborative Wins Award**

The Association of Historical Societies of New Hampshire has selected the Partners Around Lake Sunapee (PALS) Collaborative for its 2010 Public Education Award. This award was presented as part of a four-part Association event on October 23, 2010 at the Peterborough Historical Society.

The collaborative is comprised of the Newbury, New London and Sunapee Historical Societies, The Center Meeting House, The Fells, The Barn Playhouse, Lake Sunapee Protective Association and The Ice House Museum.

The Mission Statement of the Collaborative is *to preserve and present to others the history within the towns which surround Lake Sunapee.*

Pictured to the left are unidentified individuals in front of a later Fowler home on Route 103, most recently known as the Andrew Brook Lodge.



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#### Did you know?

In 1772 Zephiniah Clark was the first settler in Newbury. He was granted land in Wendell, but through an error he ended up in Fishersfield near what is now the traffic circle.

#### NHS Board of Directors

Term expires June, 2011:  
Shelly Candidus, Dennis Pavlicek & Barbara Steward

Term expires June, 2012:  
Deane Geddes, Margie Weiler & William Weiler

Term expires June, 2013:  
Frank Perrotta, Gay Sheary & Mary Thayer

**E-mail: [info@newburyhistorical.org](mailto:info@newburyhistorical.org)**  
**Website: [www.newburyhistorical.org](http://www.newburyhistorical.org)**

#### South Newbury Village

The Society is interested in documenting the history of South Newbury Village and is seeking individuals who would like to contribute to this project. There is a great deal of town history represented in the Village area which we wish to compile and preserve for future generations. We are always looking for photos which we will willingly scan and return to the owner, plus we wish to document the actual information related to each of the early buildings. Many of you have some of this rich history preserved in albums, boxed in your attic, tucked away in your memory or just lying around. Please let us know if you can assist with this project.

#### Thank you to our Business Members

Please join us in expressing your appreciation through your support.

**Davis Cabins**  
**On Lake Sunapee**  
25 Birch Grove Road  
Newbury, NH 03255  
(603) 763-4494  
Open late June to late September

**LaValley's Building Supply**  
351 Sunapee Street  
Newport, NH 03273  
(603) 863-1050  
[www.lavalleys.com](http://www.lavalleys.com)

**New Hampshire Historical Society**  
30 Park Street  
Concord, NH 03301  
(603) 228-6688  
[www.nhhistory.org](http://www.nhhistory.org)